

# Is Genesis the last book to be incorporated into the Torah?



Portion of the Temple Scroll, labeled 11Q19, one of the longest of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

by [Petr Chylek](#) (February 2022)

The first five books of the Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Torah comprise Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. According to tradition, these five books were

revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. However, some academic scholars tell us that they were written by a different author, or authors, at different times. Since Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament and of the Torah, it is generally assumed, mostly unconsciously, that it was also the first of the books to be written. I want to suggest that this is not so, and that Genesis was very likely the last addition to the Five books of Moses.

The oldest fragments of the Torah were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS): scrolls and fragments of scrolls discovered in 1947-1956 in desert caves around Qumran, close to the Dead Sea. Before that discovery, the oldest copies known were the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex dating from about the year 1000 CE. The DSS were transcribed between the years 200 BCE and 100 CE, thus they are about 1000 years older than these earlier known codices. Several hundred papers have been written about them and their extraordinary discovery. Each sentence, and even each word, has been carefully analyzed and compared to modern versions of the corresponding books. Here I wish to focus attention not on what was found among the DSS, but on what was *not* found.

The discovery amounted to a total of 187 scrolls (Table 1) containing some parts of the first five books of the Old Testament. Among those there are 24 scrolls from Genesis, clearly suggesting that Genesis was not neglected by the inhabitants of the Qumran community. Only Deuteronomy shows a larger number of scrolls, 33. However, 16 of the Genesis chapters were not found among the DSS discoveries, while only three chapters (Table 1) of the four other books are unaccounted for. Thus 32% (16 out of 50 chapters) of the Genesis chapters are missing, while only 2.2% (3 out of 137 chapters) of the chapters from the other four books of Moses are missing.

Such a large difference cannot be due to chance alone. If the percentage of missing chapters in Genesis was the same as the

average percentage of missing chapters in the four other books (2.2%) there would be just one chapter of Genesis missing. The 16 chapters represent a 1600% greater difference than would be expected from chance alone. One can design several different statistical tests, but all of them lead to a similar result. Such a discrepancy leads me to believe that Genesis does not belong to the same age-group as the other four books of the Torah.

Table 1: Name of the book, number of scrolls of given book found among DSS, number of chapters in each book, number of chapters not found among DSS, and percentage of missing chapters.

Book	# Scrolls	# Chapters	# Chapters missing in DSS	% of Chapters missing in DSS
Genesis	24	50	16	32.0 %
Exodus	18	40	0	0 %
Leviticus	17	27	1	3.7 %
Numbers	16	36	2	5.5 %
Deuteronomy	33	34	0	0 %

Since the dating of the DSS demonstrates that they were written or copied within the time period between 200 BCE and 100 CE, I suggest that the book of Genesis was not yet fully accepted as a part of the Jewish canon at that time. This is also supported by portions of two scrolls different from Genesis, which, however, contain fragments of similar material, namely the Book of Jubilees and the Genesis Apocryphon. Thus, at the time of the composition of the DSS there were likely three competing versions of the Genesis story, and it had not yet been decided which of those should be canonized as a part of the Torah or of the Old Testament. This might well explain why so many chapters of Genesis were not found. Some scholars suggest that the final version of the

Jewish canon was finalized by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish legislative body and Supreme Court) meeting in Yavne during the first and second century of the common era. After the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the subsequent destruction of the Second Temple the Sanhedrin was relocated from Jerusalem to Yavne, close to the current Tel Aviv.

Other explanations, of course, may help to account for the missing chapters of Genesis. I hope that some of the scholars working in this field and in Jewish history of early first millennium CE will be able to provide them in the near future.

The Genesis chapters unaccounted for in the DSS are: 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 38, and 44. To describe the significance of these chapters would likely require serious research in a department of Jewish or Religious Studies. Let me only briefly comment on a few of the most interesting missing portions.

In Chapter 9, God gives permission for people to eat meat – to kill animals for food. Before the “Fall of Adam and Eve,” mankind was allowed to eat only vegetarian food. Thus, it is interesting to note that this part is not included in the DSS.

Chapters 16 and 21, neither of which are included among the DSS, describe incidents involving Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Hagar, identified as the mother of Ishmael is twice forced to leave the house and run to the desert due to conflicts between her and Sarah. The entire story involving Hagar and Abraham, and Hagar and Sarah are absent from the extant scrolls.

The meeting of Judah and his daughter in-law Tamar in chapter 38 is also missing. This story especially seems not to belong to the flow of events before and after Chapter 38.

It is likely that some of these major stories of Genesis are missing purely by chance, but it is also possible that some were inserted in later times or produced by combination of the Genesis scroll with the other two scrolls mentioned earlier.

As mentioned above, about 1000 years elapsed between the time the DSS were transcribed and the next surviving Torah texts (Aleppo and Leningrad Codices). During this time Genesis probably underwent several editorial revisions and additions.

I would like to thank two great Dead Sea Scrolls experts, Professors J. VanderKam and L. Schiffman, who agreed with my “discovery” that a disproportional number of Genesis chapters are missing from the DSS. Neither, however, supports my suggested explanation. I thank to Robert Gear for his suggestions and comments on the earlier draft of this paper.

## [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

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